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AN ERA OF RENEWAL OF THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD IN INDIA

(This is a panoramic view of the Church in India's concerted effort during the last quarter century, still more during the last one decade, in the field of Catechetics. This is a part of the long document which the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India approved at their Bombay meeting and communicated to the Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1977. It is an official and unanimous expression of the Hierarchy's appreciation for the Catechetical Renewal Movement and of their evaluation of the role played by the National Catechetical Centre. This coincides with the 10th Anniversary of the foundation of NBCLC: Feb-March '77.

—Editor).

The nearly nine million Catholics of the Christian community in India feel grateful to God in Jesus Christ for the gift of faith; they rejoice at being the community of faith in this land and they accept responsibility for the education of the faith of its members.

The Church in India

The Church in India is the fruit of evangelisation efforts spread over two thousand years. Different missionary orders evangelised various parts of India in this period of time. The spread of Christianity is quite uneven as is the size and nature of the Christian population in various regions. India is a mosaic of races and civilizations, of languages and cultures, of religions and traditions. This mosaic is equally reflected in the Church in India. We run the risk of being inaccurate whenever we generalise about India. However there are certain elements common to the Church in India about which we can speak.

Three Stages of Catechetical Movement

It is to this varied community that the call to renewal was addressed by the Second Vatican Council and other renewal movements. It is faith which gives us Christian existence and constitutes the Church as the community of Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord.

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... of education of faith,
making our faith ever more personal and communitarian, more
living and adult leading us to full Christian maturity. The cate-
chetical movement can be singled out from the various renewal
movements that have been launched during this century and which
have contributed to this renewal process. It had its origin roughly
at the turn of the century. It developed in three different stages,
each underlining a particular aspect. India entered into this world-
wide movement at every stage and contributed to it by manifesting
in its life some of the aspects highlighted by the movement.

A New Period in Indian Church History

The evangelisation of various parts of India can be traced
back to different periods and agents. Its level of pastoral co-
ordination was restricted to regions or dioceses within each
mission. Three important events constituted a watershed in the
history of the Church in India and ushered in a new era in which
the various regions and missions began to be integrated within
the larger framework of the whole country. Pastoral renewal
began to be organised and coordinated at the national level in
view of a comprehensive pastorage. The three events which
opened up this new period are:

- i) the meeting of the Metropolitans and the foundation of
the CBCI in 1944 as a national Episcopal Conference;
- ii) the Independence of India in August, 1947
- iii) the constitution of India as a Republic and the First
Plenary Council of the Church in India in January, 1950.

The entire hierarchy of India met for the first time since
Independence at this last mentioned important event to re-
think the whole mission of the Church in the changed
context of the country. Among its Acts and Decrees there is a
chapter on catechists. There is another on the preaching of God's
Word, especially on catechetical instruction (nos. 176-180: 199-
207). According to one of its recommendations, a Section for Cate-
chetics was established within the CBCI. Thus we have had a
25 year tradition of a national level co-ordination in catechetics
under the auspices of the Bishops' Conference of India.

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National Catechetical Centre and Post-Vatican Renewal:

It was not until the post-conciliar era that a planned all-round catechetical renewal at all levels of the Church in India was to take place. All the Bishops of India, gathered in Ordinary General Meeting in Delhi in October, 1966, explored ways to spread and communicate the spirit of the Council and to implement its renewal programmes in every area of the Church's life all over India. They stressed that central importance of catechetics when they stated it to be "the pastoral policy of the Church in India to place the liturgical and catechetical apostolate at the very centre of its activities, giving them prime importance in its cares and preoccupations". (Report p. 11). Among the many decisions which the Bishops took in this regard, one was to found a National Catechetical Centre (NBCLC) in Bangalore in order to animate, foster and co-ordinate catechetical renewal from a national level. The foundation of this Centre in February 1967 situated catechetics in the total context and full scope of Church renewal and underscored the importance of catechesis as an area and dimension of overall renewal.

Programmes

The first concern of the Centre was that there be global vision of the Lord's designs for His Church in India in the next decades, and to draw up a long-range programme of renewal for the whole country. The comprehensive vision was not to remain a dream nor the long-range programme a dead letter: they were to be translated into reality by implementing short term programmes and establishing priorities to meet the concrete and urgent needs of the hour.

Structure

This implementation required the minimum structures of operation and collaboration. At the national level the catechetical movement is animated and guided by the CBCI Commission for Catechetics, with consultors from all over the country and by the National Catechetical Centre which is well equipped with adequate and trained staff, a planned and phased programme, resources and other facilities.

At the regional level (comprising one or more States) Regional Centres or Regional Commissions have been set up. In every diocese there is a diocesan director of catechetics, half the number of whom have been trained in catechetics. One fifth of the number of dioceses have full-time directors. Some dioceses have a diocesan catechetical centre and/or commission. There are at present ten Catechists' Training Schools to train full-time catechists. Professors of Catechetics in Major Seminaries and other Houses of Formation are regularly contacted with regard to catechetical training and teaching.

These various categories of leaders participate actively in a triennial All-India Catechetical Consultation convened by the National Episcopal Commission for Catechetics. During the Consultation they evaluate their efforts, identify the trends of renewal in the country, assess the progress made and the stages reached, and plan further course of action. The Bishops study and examine their recommendations and take relevant decisions for action.

Focus on Formation:

During the last decade the focus of attention and the greatest efforts have been directed towards the formation of all those who have a catechetical ministry. Renewal in general or in any special sphere calls for dedicated people, transformed in spirit and vision, in mentality and attitudes, in relationships and values. Catechetical renewal supposes that we have at every level and in every institution, a team of competent people who have undergone a process of conversion and received technical, professional training in modern catechetics. These people should have the benefit of actual practical experience of catechising and be enabled to live the incarnational spirituality. That is why the concentration over the past ten years has been on the overall formation and catechetical training of all those who do a catechetical ministry whether priests or religious or laity.

Numerous seminars and courses of varying durations for various groups and categories of people have been organised all over the country by the National Centre, Bangalore, as well as by regional and diocesan agencies and by religious orders. The National Centre alone has offered training programmes and refresher courses to approximately 15,000 people, including many major religious superiors and Bishops. The Regional Centres at Tindivanam, Cochin, Hyderabad, Goa, Bombay, Baroda, Patna and Imphal are

active and growing and increasingly meeting the wider needs of their dioceses and regions.

The Incarnational Approach and New Catechisms:

Catechetical institutes around the world generally are using the Human Approach or Incarnational Approach based on Vatican II theology. Each country is evolving its own style. India, too, is using this approach which led the National Centre to compose catechisms for various groups, adapted to the conditions of our people in India, and graded for the different age-groups of children and youth in our schools and parishes. The publication of up-to-date catechisms was the first and urgent demand made of the National Centre but this demand was not met until conditions favourable to creative and original work were obtained. When thousands of people had been trained, structures set up, and directors equipped for the role of leadership, attention was directed to the composition of catechism. Only trained persons can properly use new instruments—such as texts—but the composition of catechism, truly expressive of Christian communities at grips with the situations, problems and challenges of life, also presupposes training. With this conviction, the NBCLC, after several experiments in various regions and situations, published the GOD-WITH-US series, geared to the 10 years of school life. It has a teacher's guide and a student's text for each of these 10 years. The series is the result of a team-work involving several groups drawn from all over the country. This series has now been creatively adapted into various languages of India. Other series, too, have been composed in some dioceses and regions. Before these new books are introduced teachers are given initiation and training. The work is being continually evaluated.

Integrated Pastoral Action and Liaison:

In all these efforts, the other dimensions of pastoral ministry were not lost sight of. Catechesis has been constantly situated in the over-all renewal of the Church following Vatican II. This ministry has been related to other sections of the pastorate by dialogue, consultation and co-operation. Liaison was maintained with the sister Churches of the whole world in mutual dialogue and sharing.

The Specifically Indian Character:

In this way India has had its own planning and approach to catechetical renewal, its own policy, strategy and programme. While it has tried to maintain a specific Indian character, it has, in various ways, contributed, its share to the catechetical movement at world level. In the course of this renewal movement we have been partly inspired by and we have partly shaped a catechetical pedagogy based on sound theology and human sciences. In this approach there are elements and aspects common to the world-wide movement and some specific to India.

The Task Ahead:

Even though we are aware of the achievements of our planned programme for catechetical renewal and thank God for it, we are mindful of our inadequacies and of the task that lies ahead. Those who have been trained need regular refresher courses and in-service training—in a real sense, the training of a catechist is life-long. There are very many people still to be trained. There is still a need to inspire and motivate a large number of priests, religious and laity to devote themselves to the catechetical ministry. God is generous in giving the graces necessary to build His people. Those with the potential must be discovered, trained and employed. The enormous resources we have in the thousands of religious of India have not been fully available for this ministry.

A fact that should cause deep concern, perhaps most of all, is that our seminaries and scholasticates do not provide sufficient training for the ministry of the Word and seldom have properly trained and experienced full-time professors of catechetics. On account of this our future priests are not formed to be confident and effective in that ministry for which they are ordained.

These are some of the tasks, the major ones, to which we must address ourselves if our Synod reflection is to “lead to a concerted commitment to renewal, namely, the building up of the Church in the context of today and in the concrete situation of the Christian community as a whole.”

A QUALITY DOCUMENT OF THE CBCI

Extraordinary Meeting of the CBCI, January 1977

D. S. Amalorpavadass

The Bishops of India met at Bombay, 9-15 January to study the Synod theme on Catechetics and to attend to the pressing problems of the Church in India today. Nearly 90 bishops were present.

The Bishops studied the Synod theme, 'Catechetics in our times, in workshop, lasting three sessions. This was introduced by a model catechesis according to the new approach called human approach. The teenagers were from Carmel School, Bandra and the Catechist was Fr. Daly, sj. of Patna. The Bishops had two background papers: 1) the Workshop guidelines prepared by the Synodal teams of experts; it contained a) extracts from Regional Reports, b) quotations from the official documents of the Church, and c) suggestions and questions for group discussion. 2) The second paper was called 'Service Document' prepared by the IV All-India Catechetical Meeting held at NBCLC, Bangalore, 5-10 December 1976. The Bishops appreciated both the documents, made full use of them as source material and background information.

The drafting committee prepared a draft of 'the communication of the CBCI to the Synod of Bishops', Rome 1977. This draft based on the Bishops' Workshop Reports and on the two background papers mentioned above, ran to 27 pages, with 122 paragraphs and the reading took nearly 1 hour and 45 minutes. The Bishops expressed great appreciation for the document and approved of it as fit for sending to Rome. A few valuable suggestions were made to improve the draft and to highlight the points that the Synod should discuss in October.

This official Communication of the CBCI is a comprehensive document covering all aspects of modern catechetics, and proposing practical and relevant action programme for on-going Catechetical renewal in India. Apart from its usefulness and contribution to the Synod, its value consists in this: that it is the official confirmation of the work, trends, and values of Catechetical Renewal Movement in India. It also set an official seal on the spirit and vision, theology and pedagogy, principles and approach,

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method and techniques of modern Catechetics, based on Vatican II. It was also a tribute paid to the work done by various agencies especially during the last decade. It expresses the appreciation for the human approach or incarnational approach and the new Catechisms— **God-With-Us Series**, and for the National Catechetical Centre as well as for regional, diocesan and other centres.

We publish in this number the Introductory Part of it. We shall publish every month an extract from it. The whole document is of quality and standard worthy of the Church in India. It is definitely a blueprint for further action in India and an invaluable contribution to the universal Church and the Synod. As a matter of fact we will continue to study in India the Synodal theme till the next All-India Catechetical Meeting in 78/79. This document will be soon printed and will be available for wider distribution to priests, religious and lay leaders as desired by the Bishops.

The drafting committee consisted of Archbishop Leobard D'Souza, Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, Fr. Ed. J. Daly, sj., Fr. Jude Pereira, Fr. P.C. Thomas, Bro. Finn and Mr. P.T. Thomas.

The other topics discussed by the Bishops during this extraordinary General Meeting are: St. John's Medical College (4 sections), Family Planning and compulsory sterilization, appointment of Bishops, leadership of Bishops for the promotion of justice.

A joint session was held in the morning of the last day, 15th January with members of the National Advisory Council (NAC).

The overall impression was that it was a fruitful meeting.

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